

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The Department of Defense and United States Navy have unique capabilities and surge capabilities that can be brought to help with the fight against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) virus. Our priorities are clear ... 1) protect our force and their families, 2) protect our readiness to defend the homelands and 3) support our interagency partners in addressing the crisis.

We are committed to providing defense support to civil authorities by increasing medical capacity and collaboration for medical assistance and disaster relief in the two areas of our country that have seen tremendous impact from the COVID-19 pandemic.

USNS Comfort is an example of Americans helping Americans – we are your Navy, and in time of crisis, we stand ready to answer the call to support civil authorities (FEMA, Government of NY) and the American people.

As military men and women, we prepare daily to deal with adversity, uncertainty and conflict. Our Sailors and their families are resilient and will set an example for their friends, neighbors and local communities on how to make personal sacrifices in service of the collective good.

USNS COMFORT:

- Effective April 6, USNS COMFORT began accepting trauma, emergency and urgent care patients without regard to their COVID status. The Javits New York Medical Station continues to be DoD's primary facility for COVID-19 patients.
- The Javits New York Medical Station and USNS Comfort together act as an integrated system working inside the larger New York City medical system, with support provided to New Jersey Hospitals. The ability to take COVID-19 patients on board USNS Comfort provides increased capability to care for high severity COVID-positive cases, allowing the Javits New York Medical Station to focus on lower severity COVID-positive patients.
- "Taking on more patients as quickly as possible is critical to helping the city of New York during this pandemic crisis," said Vice Adm. Andrew Lewis, commander U.S. Second Fleet. "We listened to the feedback from area health professionals and the community and believe this is the best way we can help our fellow Americans."
- The USNS Comfort hospital ship was ready on arrival to support state and local agencies' efforts to protect the health of the American people, in the whole-of-government approach directed by the President of the United States.
- Comfort brought with her a team of medical professionals, medical equipment and supplies to provide a spectrum of medical care to include critical and urgent care for adults.
- The ship works closely with local health officials to decide which cases are sent to USNS Comfort. These decisions are based on the capabilities of USNS Comfort medical teams and the local officials' determination of patient priority.

- The ship can maintain up to 5,000 units of blood and now has a 500-bed capacity. Of the 500 beds, 80 are for ICU patients. However, we have the capability to surge to 100 ICU beds if necessary. The ship is equipped with four X-ray machines, one CAT scan unit, a dental suite, an optometry and lens laboratory, physical therapy center, pharmacy, angiography suite and two oxygen-producing plants.
- We are continuing to take proactive measures to ensure that patients coming aboard are properly screened for COVID-19. The ship operates as an afloat hospital and has infection control procedures that are followed, just as any hospital ashore.
- USNS Comfort medical professionals continue to work to reduce possible infection to ensure the safety of our patients and providers alike.
- The Navy maintains stringent cleanliness standards aboard U.S. Navy ships to support crew health and well-being. The Navy follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance for healthcare providers to mitigate the potential of any outbreak aboard USNS Comfort while providing increased medical capacities.
- Beginning April 17, USNS Comfort began treating patients from New Jersey. Admission criteria for patients from New Jersey is the same as patients from New York.
- This is a battle, one that we fight along with New Yorkers, and surrounding areas. It is important to remember that the environment aboard a ship is not the same as a field hospital on shore, and has special considerations that must be accounted for.
- USNS Comfort arrived in New York City Monday morning, March 29, 2020 to the Manhattan Cruise Terminal (Pier 90 North) after conducting some necessary operations at sea. The length of the deployment to New York City will be determined in coordination with local authorities and their assessment of the continued need for support.
- Comfort deployed with nearly 1,200 medical personnel and civilian mariners.
- The ship was stocked with adequate supplies to begin the mission. Comfort was ready on arrival and coordinates transfers with local hospitals, with careful consideration to the safety and security of patients and care providers.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:**Q: Has the Comfort embarked patients?**

A: Yes. Comfort was ready on arrival and coordinated transfers with local hospitals with careful consideration to the safety and security of patients and care providers. The first patient transferred to USNS Comfort was Thursday, April 2, 2020. The Javits New York Medical Station and USNS Comfort together act as an integrated-system working together inside a larger New York City medical system with support provided to New Jersey Hospitals.

Q: What is the current total of patients being treated aboard Comfort?

A: The total number of patients will continue to be in flux while the Comfort is in New York. Daily updates will not be distributed or released.

Q: Is USNS Comfort treating patients from New Jersey?

A: Yes. Beginning April 17, USNS Comfort began treating patients from New Jersey. Admission criteria for patients from New Jersey is the same as patients from New York.

Q: Are patients being tested for COVID-19 before being transported to USNS Comfort?

A: Initially, all patients being brought to USNS Comfort had received negative COVID-19 test results from their discharging hospital.

In order to bring additional patients aboard and as an effort to provide greater relief to NYC hospitals, as of April 6, USNS Comfort began accepting trauma, emergency and urgent care patients without regard to their COVID status. The Javits New York Medical Station continues to be DoD's primary facility for COVID-19 patients.

Q: What do you do if someone becomes symptomatic or tests positive for COVID-19?

A: Patients who become symptomatic or test positive for COVID-19 will be isolated from other patients and will continue to receive care. The Comfort has the capability to isolate COVID-positive patients, and is able to continue the mission.

The Javits New York Medical Station and USNS Comfort together act as an integrated-system working together inside a larger New York City medical system, with support provided to New Jersey Hospitals.

Q: Is this change in procedure a result of some of the negative press surrounding the small number of patients that the Comfort has taken since arriving in NYC?

A: This is a complex situation that requires us to continually assess the situation on the ground and the needs of the New York City hospitals. In order to admit more patients and relieve the pressure on the hospitals, it's necessary that we reassess our patient admission criteria to see how we can take on more patients. In order to protect our providers and our patients, we will continue to look at ways to increase our patient population while mitigating the chance of transmitting COVID-19 on board.

The Javits New York Medical Station and USNS Comfort together act as an integrated-system working together inside a larger New York City medical system, with support provided to New Jersey Hospitals.

Q: Are New York City ambulances bringing injured/sick people to USNS Comfort?

A: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in New York City has determined how patients are first identified and then transferred from area hospitals to the ship. This involves coordination with several area hospitals. Prior to patient transfer, both civilian physicians and USNS Comfort physicians will develop a patient care plan. All patients are screened for COVID-19 before transferring to the ship.

Q: Is USNS Comfort keeping patients overnight if needed?

A: Yes, some patients require an overnight or longer stay, which is determined by ship physicians in coordination with the patients' physician. The ship can accommodate up to 1,000 patients at any given time.

Q: I heard that someone assigned to USNS Comfort tested positive for COVID-19. Is this accurate?

A: Yes, several crewmembers assigned to USNS Comfort have tested positive for COVID-19.

Q: Were the COVID-positive crewmembers in contact with patients?

A: No. None of the crewmembers have been in contact with patients.

Q: What will happen to these COVID-positive crewmembers? What will happen to those who came in close contact with them?

A: The crewmembers will remain isolated per CDC guidelines. Other crewmembers who were in contact with the COVID-19 positive individuals will remain isolated from patients, have their temperature taken daily, be screened for COVID-19 symptoms, and continue to wear proper PPE.

Q: Is there any intent to move these crewmembers off the ship?

A: No. The COVID-positive crewmembers will remain on board and will receive treatment from USNS Comfort medical personnel, if needed.

Q: Is the rest of the USNS Comfort crew safe?

A: Yes. To mitigate the risk of inadvertent exposure to COVID-19 for the crew, the military treatment facility (MTF) has been completely isolated from the rest of the ship.

Q: Are crewmembers or other patients on board USNS Comfort at risk?

A: The ship is following protocols and taking every precaution to ensure the health and safety of all crewmembers and patients on board the Comfort. The hospital ship has infection control procedures that are followed, just as any civilian hospital ashore. Additionally, all personnel aboard the Comfort practice preventative hygiene measures and sanitization procedures recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and DoD to help prevent further spread of COVID-19.

Q: Will the patients be transferred off the USNS Comfort or remain on board?

A: Patients who test positive for COVID-19 while on board are isolated and will continue to receive care. The Comfort has the capability to isolate COVID-positive patients, and is able to continue the mission.

The Javits New York Medical Station and USNS Comfort together act as an integrated-system working together inside a larger New York City medical system with support provided to New Jersey Hospitals.

Q: Why are you moving medical personnel ashore, if they will still be working aboard USNS Comfort?

A: The USNS Comfort was separated between the military treatment facility (MTF) section, where patients are being seen, and the rest of the ship.

Additionally, beginning April 6, clinical staff aboard USNS Comfort moved some personnel ashore to a local hotel. The move included medical, nursing and staff corps who have significant contact with patients as part of the performance of their daily duties. The move will reduce the number of crewmembers present in the common areas on the ship such as the berthing and mess decks, and make it easier for us to demonstrate social distancing as directed by the CDC and DoD.

Personnel going ashore are not authorized liberty, and are bussed between the local hotel and the ship each day. This move of personnel ashore is another measure taken to reduce the risk of potential exposure to COVID-19.

Q: Does this change the type of patients that USNS Comfort will treat?

A: The Javits New York Medical Station and USNS Comfort together act as an integrated system working together inside a larger New York City medical system, with support provided to New Jersey Hospitals. The ability to take COVID-19 patients on board USNS Comfort allows for increased capability to care for high severity COVID-positive cases, allowing the Javits New York Medical Station to focus on lower severity COVID-positive patients.

Additionally, New Jersey state hospitals coordinate with USNS Comfort doctors and the Javits New York Medical Station to ensure patients can be transferred to the USNS Comfort.

Taking on COVID-positive patients as quickly as possible is critical to helping the city of New York and New Jersey during this pandemic crisis. We listened to the feedback from area health professionals and the community and believe this is the best way we can help our fellow Americans and provide the relief valve USNS Comfort came to provide.

Q: How many personnel will be moved ashore?

A: Approximately 800 will be moved ashore. These are medical, nursing and staff corps who have significant contact with patients as part of the performance of their daily duties

Q: What hotel are the transferred personnel going to?

A: In order to protect our personnel, we will not be naming the hotel. We can say that the hotel was previously closed, and has only opened for medical personnel from Comfort.

Q: Why aren't more patients being treated aboard Comfort?

A: The Javits New York Medical Station and USNS Comfort together act as an integrated-system working together inside a larger New York City medical system, with support provided to New Jersey Hospitals.

Q: What types of procedures can be performed aboard Comfort?

A: USNS Comfort provides added medical capacity to New York hospitals. The hospital ship has a full spectrum of surgical and medical services, including: 12 operating rooms, four X-rays, one CAT scan unit, a dental suite, an optometry and lens laboratory, a physical therapy center, a pharmacy, an invasive angiography suite and two oxygen-producing plants. Comfort also maintains up to 5,000 units of blood and now has 500 beds. Of the 500, 80 are ICU beds and we have the capability to surge to 100 if necessary.

Patients are assessed for various medical treatments and whether surgery is deemed necessary. During Operation Noble Eagle, in response to the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, USNS Comfort was pier side in Manhattan where the ship's crew provided meals, housing, medical and psychological services to volunteer and relief workers at ground zero from Sept. 14 - Oct. 1, 2001.

Q: How were the locations for the hospital ships selected to deploy/support?

A: As the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) director Peter T. Gaynor stated, FEMA selected the locations based on analysis for the potential need for hospital beds on each coast, and where the ships would have the greatest impact.

Q: How long will USNS Comfort remain in the supported area?

A: The ship will stay as long as local officials consider their presence to be of value. The USNS Comfort's mission is not to treat COVID-19 patients aboard, but to help the surrounding health care system by treating other patients who do not suffer from COVID-19.

Q: How long can the ship operate without resupply?

A: The ship operates pier side and can resupply using in-port procedures with mitigations in place to ensure the safe on load of supplies.

Q: Did Army pharmacists join the medial team to support USNS Comfort?

A: Yes. The week of April 6, two U.S. Army pharmacists checked onboard as part of the Navy team to assist the pharmacy department. That brings the total to five pharmacists on the Comfort to care for the patients.

This is truly a joint military effort on the Navy hospital ship, and a whole of government approach to help New York battle the deadly virus.

Q: How many Navy and Marine Corp Reservists are in New York and surrounding areas, supporting area hospitals?

A: For specific information regarding Reservists, please contact Army North Public Affairs.

Q: What is the projected cost of this deployment?

A: The projected budget has not been determined yet.

Q: Will there be an opportunity for media to embark USNS Comfort?

A: In an effort to protect the crew and patients, no media will be allowed to walk onboard the ship. The Public Affairs staff will facilitate requests for video and telephonic interviews with ship leadership and crew.

Q: Will USNS Comfort take walk-in patients?

A: No. The hospital ship works with local health officials to accept patient transfers from local area hospitals. We are, in essence, a “relief valve” for the local civilian hospitals in coastal locations so that local health professionals can better focus on COVID-19 cases. By providing care to patients in need of treatment not related to COVID-19, we increase the local civilian hospitals’ capacity to focus on the treatment of their COVID-19 patients.

Q: If I am seen on the ship, how do I pay for services? Will they take my insurance card?

A: There are no anticipated costs to patients treated on the ship. The care we provide in the United States is similar to the care we provide around the world when we conduct humanitarian and disaster relief missions. The President declared COVID-19 a National Emergency. The deployment of America’s hospital ships is an investment in health and wellness for America’s people.

Q: Will the Navy bill patients and insurance providers for the medical care they receive aboard the ship?

A: The President, our Commander-in-Chief, declared COVID-19 a National Emergency. The deployment of America’s hospital ships is an investment in health and wellness of our people. This mission also contributes to the readiness and training of our force. For individuals treated aboard hospital ships, there is no anticipated cost. It is similar to the care the ship provides around the world when humanitarian and disaster relief missions are conducted. It is important to understand that the value of care we are providing cannot be measured in dollars alone. This is an investment made to ensure we are prepared when a future disaster strikes.

Q: If I am referred to be seen by a doctor on the ship, what do I need to bring with me?

A: For patients referred to USNS Comfort, your care provider will let you know what you will need to bring. Physicians aboard USNS Comfort work directly with the patients’ civilian physician to ensure a safe and thorough turn over before the patient is transferred to the ship.

Q: My child is home from school, can I bring him/her?

A: No, the ship is not equipped to support non-patient children. In order to maintain a sterile environment, patients may not bring minors aboard the ship at any time.

Q: Can I bring my support/service animal on the ship while being treated?

A: No, in order to maintain a sterile environment aboard the ship, patients are not allowed to bring support/service animals aboard on the ship.

Q: How do I get to the ship? Is there parking?

A: If your doctor refers you to the ship, you will receive specific instructions on how to get to the ship. There is no parking available at the pier for patients.

Q: Are there visiting hours for patients being treated on the ship?

A: No, in order to maintain a sterile environment aboard the ship, patients are not allowed to have visitors aboard the ship.

Q: Can civilian clergy be allowed to visit patients being treated on the ship?

A: No, in order to maintain a sterile environment aboard the ship, patients are not allowed to have visitors aboard the ship.

Q: Are kosher or halal meals available on the ship for patients?

A: Yes, the ship is equipped to provide meals to individuals who have religious meal requirements.

Q: My regular physician is licensed in New York. Are the medical personnel on USNS Comfort also licensed to practice in New York?

A: Our qualified care providers are licensed to practice on this DOD ship in New York. They come from various Navy medical facilities across the country, as well as reservists with medical backgrounds.

Q: Have any patients died onboard?

A: We provide information concerning the status of any non-DoD member being cared for at our medical facilities in NYC to the State of New York, Department of Health and the New York City Health and Hospitals. Please contact their public information office for more information.

Q: Is there a morgue onboard?

A: Yes, the hospital ship is equipped with a morgue. The ship works closely with the state coroner in the event someone dies while onboard.

Q: Can the ship deliver babies?

A: No, the ship is not delivering babies aboard. Currently the ship is not equipped with an OBGYN Birth Center; however, each patient is accessed upon need on a case-by-case basis. Coordination with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in New York City has determined how patients are first identified and then transferred from area hospitals to the ship. Prior to patient transfer, both civilian physicians and USNS Comfort physicians develop a patient care plan. The ship's operating rooms contain the same contemporary equipment used in shore-based hospitals.

Q: Is the ship treating cancer patients?

A: No. Each patient is accessed upon need on a case-by-case basis. Coordination with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in New York City has determined how patients are first identified and then transferred from area hospitals to the ship. Prior to patient

transfer, both civilian physicians and USNS Comfort physicians develop a patient care plan. The ship's operating rooms contain the same contemporary equipment used in shore-based hospitals.

Q: Do patients have private rooms? If not, can they pay extra to get a private room?

A: No, the hospital ship has an open-bay design configuration and with 1,000 available beds. Patients cannot pay to get a special or private rooms.

Q: Are the doctors and crew aboard USNS Comfort permanently assigned to the ship?

A: No. The hospital ship does not maintain a full crew or medical staff. Care providers aboard came from various Navy medical facilities across the country, as well as carefully selected reservists.

Q: Where did medical staffs come from to support USNS Comfort?

A: The physicians, nurses and other medical support personnel were drawn from Navy Medicine professionals at military treatment facilities across the country. Available reservists also fill some of the medical positions aboard. The Defense Health Agency, as the administrator of these military treatment facilities, worked to reduce the impact of the movement of these active duty medical professionals to the ship. Local medical commanders from their home units also worked to minimize the impact to patient care. We appreciate the shared sacrifice and inconvenience of everyone affected as we work with national authorities to position medical resources where they are most needed.

Q: Did bringing in Navy reservists who are medical professionals negatively impact their own communities?

A: We have worked to ensure our volunteer reservists were available to support the medical relief efforts, while also minimizing the impact to their local communities. When the Navy Reserve was asked to help find medical professionals to help support this mission, Commander, Navy Reserve Force received more than 200 volunteer requests from our reserve medical community to help support both the active duty medical community. The specialized skillsets that our Navy reservists possess make us an indispensable force multiplier in support of this critical mission. Each volunteer reservist was screened and asked directly whether or not they could help without hurting their local community. If there was no impact and they were still willing to help, we gave them orders.

Q: We heard USNS Comfort was in maintenance. What did it take to get her ready to leave Norfolk so quickly?

A: Amazing teamwork. USNS Comfort had been in a pier side Mid-Term Availability (MTA) since Dec. 5, 2019, and expedited maintenance to ensure she was ready to answer the call to support civil authorities (FEMA, Government of NY) and the American people. The ship's civil service mariner crew, along with our industry partners, were provided outstanding support by the U.S. Coast Guard. All in all, it was a great team success.

Q: Were crew members and medical staff tested for COVID-19 prior to embarking the ship?

A: All crew members supporting this mission have undergone two screening processes, the same used by medical professionals across the country – one before departing their home of record and

one before boarding USNS Comfort. The screening consisted of a temperature check and health questionnaire. Based on that screening, crew members and medical staff were screened for COVID-19 in order to minimize the risk of an outbreak aboard USNS Comfort.

Q: How are crew members and medical staff protecting themselves from contracting COVID-19 once onboard?

A: The hospital ship operates as a hospital and has infection control procedures that will be followed, just as any hospital ashore. The ship is equipped with appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) as required. Additionally, all personnel aboard Comfort practice preventative hygiene measures recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Additionally, rigorous cleaning is done throughout the hospital ship to ensure the safety of the patients and crew.

Q: What was the screening process for crew members embarking aboard USNS Comfort?

A: Crew members and medical staff are screened using the same process that medical professionals across the country are using, which is a series of questions addressing the member's recent health and contact history.

Q: Does Comfort have access to adequate personal protective equipment (PPE), and how much is required?

A: The ship has personal protective equipment (PPE) in the form of facemasks and shields, protective suites, gloves, boot covers, etc. We have supplied the ship to meet this mission with the expectation that there will be a high turnover rate.

Q: Did the pier at the Manhattan Cruise Terminal need to be dredged to support the ship?

A: Yes, Pier 90N had to be dredged to support USNS Comfort.

Q: Who paid for the dredging?

A: The city paid for the expenses for dredging in conjunction with this initiative.

Q: Who requested for the ship to come to New York City?

A: New York Governor Andrew Cuomo requested President Donald Trump to provide relief for the ongoing medical demands in the state of New York. Defense Secretary Mark Esper ordered the Navy to "lean forward" to deploy the ship to the state.

Q: Why didn't the ship go to Brooklyn or Staten Island instead?

A: The ship is moored at Pier 90N in Manhattan, which can better support the needs and requirements of the ship.